

VZCZCXRO8195
OO RUEHDBU RUEHFL RUEHKW RUEHLA RUEHNP RUEHROV RUEHSR
DE RUEHPG #0269/01 1391524
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 191524Z MAY 09
FM AMEMBASSY PRAGUE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1372
INFO RUEHZL/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHINGTON DC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 06 PRAGUE 000269

SIPDIS

EUR/CE FOR ATRATENSEK

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/18/2019
TAGS: [EUN](#) [EZ](#) [OVIP](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)
SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR GENERAL PETRAEUS MAY 23-25 VISIT
TO THE CZECH REPUBLIC

Classified By: Political/Economic Counselor Charles O. Blaha, reasons 1
.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY: Embassy Prague warmly welcomes you to the Czech Republic May 23-25. Nearly 20 years after the 1989 "Velvet Revolution," the Czech Republic today boasts a relatively strong market economy, a lively democratic tradition, and close links with the United States. The Czech Republic has been a member of NATO since 1999 and the European Union since 2004. The country has been a steady supporter of U.S. and coalition missions, with troops in Afghanistan and Kosovo; the Czechs launched a provincial reconstruction team (PRT) in Afghanistan in March 2008 and also deployed a Special Forces unit to Afghanistan. Building on its own recent history, the Czech Republic has been a strong supporter of democratic transformation in countries like Cuba and Belarus. A major success in the bilateral relationship was the Czech accession to the Visa Waiver Program (VWP) on November 17, 2008. Currently the EU Presidency is the primary focus of the Czech Government. Priorities for the Czech EU Presidency include enhancing the EU's energy security, increasing Europe's economic competitiveness, and strengthening U.S.-EU relations. The Czech government is currently in transition. Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek's government lost a vote of no confidence on March 24, and transferred power to an "interim" government on May 8 which will lead the country until early elections in the fall. END SUMMARY.

A Valued Ally With Domestic Challenges

¶2. (C) President Vaclav Klaus tasked then-Czech Statistical Office Director Jan Fischer with forming a non-partisan, "interim" technocratic government on April 9. This occurred after the fragile three-party coalition government of Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek fell on March 24, 2009 after it lost a vote of no-confidence in the lower house of Parliament. The effort to unseat PM Topolánek during the country's EU Presidency and at a time when the global economic crisis is beginning to be felt illustrates the Czech Republic's poisoned domestic politics, in which matters of domestic and foreign policy are ignored or used to settle political scores, usually to the detriment of the Czech Republic's international standing and national interest. The largely-technocratic, "interim" government of Jan Fischer assumed power on May 8 and will govern until early elections, which are preliminarily scheduled for October 2009. Lacking any political mandate, PM Fischer's interim government will focus primarily on an economic recovery program and preparing for parliamentary elections in the fall.

¶3. (SBU) Bilateral Relations: Despite these domestic political challenges, our bilateral relations are excellent, with the Czech Republic's November 2008 entry into the Visa

Waiver Program having removed the one long-standing bilateral irritant. The country has been a steady supporter of U.S. and NATO military operations and maintains approximately 1000 troops on foreign missions. In Afghanistan, the Czechs have about 500 military and civilian officials. In 2008, they launched a provincial reconstruction team (PRT), deployed a Special Forces unit, and sent experts to an Operational Mentoring and Liaison Team (OMLT) in Afghanistan. Over the past several years, they have also maintained an infantry battalion of 450 troops in Kosovo. As a result of a domestic political standoff in December 2008 between then-PM Topolánek and opposition Social Democratic (CSSD) leader Jiří Paroubek, Topolánek's government had difficulty passing the 2009 foreign troop deployments bill. The bill eventually passed, but it came down to the wire and ugly internal politics crept into the debate. With the fall of PM Topolánek's government, and upcoming fall elections, Czech troop deployment levels for 2010 will most likely be a matter of contention. Therefore, instead of increasing the numbers, the MFA and the MOD are discussing shifting their deployed capabilities from Special Forces and other offensive assets to capabilities that help the Afghans train their own forces and increase the capacity of local institutions.

¶4. (C) In Afghanistan, in addition to being an active bilateral contributor (noted above), the Czech EU Presidency has pressed for greater EU coordination and contributions, particularly in the civilian sphere. At the EU-Afghanistan Troika Ministerial on January 23, the EU reaffirmed its long-standing commitment to Afghanistan reconstruction (from 2002-2006 the EU contributed over 1.3B euros to this effort and for 2007-2010 it has pledged 610M euros). The Czechs are

PRAGUE 00000269 002 OF 006

currently facilitating internal EU discussions on how to strengthen the current EUPOL mission in Afghanistan and how best to support upcoming Afghan presidential elections. The EU also held a EU-Pakistan Ministerial on March 13, which focused on upgrading relations and took note of the fact that the European Commission had allocated some 200M euros from 2010-2013 for rural development and education projects in Pakistan. They also will host an EU-Pakistan Summit on June 17 in Brussels, the first-ever EU Summit with Pakistan.

¶5. (SBU) Economy: Following several years of strong economic performance, the small, open, export-oriented Czech economy is now struggling with the effects of the global economic downturn, which has significantly reduced external demand for Czech exports. As a result, the economy is expected to contract by as much as three to four percent in 2009. Unemployment has climbed to 7.4 percent. Nevertheless, the Czech financial system has remained relatively healthy, and the Czech Republic is one of only four OECD countries not to have had to recapitalize its banks. The government has put forward an economic recovery program, costing almost 2 percent of GDP, designed to maintain employment and exports. Fearing the consequences to their economy should international investors put them in the same category as some of their more troubled neighbors, the Czechs have opposed any initiatives that treat Central and Eastern Europe as a unified region.

¶6. (C) Democracy Promotion: One legacy of the Czech struggle against Communism, and in particular of Vaclav Havel's many years as Czech president, is the active role the Czech government and NGOs take in promoting democracy around the world. The Czech Foreign Ministry has a special unit devoted to transformation policy. It works together with Czech NGOs to support civil society and democratic reforms in countries like Cuba, Belarus, Burma, Iraq and elsewhere. Likewise, the Czechs are one of the most active countries within the EU and the UN supporting the promotion of democracy and human rights. Prague has been home to the U.S.-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty since 1995, which broadcasts to many countries in transition in Eastern Europe, Central Asia and the Middle East.

Czech EU Presidency

¶17. (C) The Czechs, who joined the EU in May 2004, assumed the rotating six-month presidency from the French on January 1, 2009 and hand over to the Swedes on July 1, 2009. This is the first time the Czech Republic has held the EU presidency, and only the second time for one of the 12 newest EU member states. (Slovenia was the first, in January 2007.) In consultation with their EU partners, the Czechs outlined three top priorities underneath their overarching theme of "Europe Without Borders." These are commonly referred to as the "Three Es" for their presidency: EU economic competitiveness, energy security, and external relations. Within external relations, the Czechs have focused on the Western Balkans, Transatlantic Relations, and the Eastern Partnership. These priorities, along with the global financial crisis and earlier this year the Russian-Ukraine gas crisis, have kept the Czechs extremely busy. This pace will continue through the last two months of their EU Presidency, with several key events: several EU Summits (with China, Russia, Korea, and Pakistan), European Parliamentary elections the first week of June, and the naming of a new European Commission President (although it appears likely Commission President Barroso will be approved for a second term).

¶18. (C) Transatlantic Relations: On April 5 the Czechs pulled together the widely applauded U.S.-EU Summit and Foreign Ministerial with President Obama, Secretary Clinton and all EU leaders and foreign ministers. The discussions at these two events dovetailed well with USG priorities. U.S. and EU leaders discussed the economic and financial situation, energy and climate change, and the "Space between the Mediterranean and Caspian Sea." At the same time, Secretary Clinton and the foreign ministers discussed Eastern Europe, the Western Balkans, Afghanistan/Pakistan and the Middle East. The importance of channeling more effort and energy into the Transatlantic Economic Council (TEC) was referenced by several EU leaders, as well as President Obama, who indicated he would encourage his team to "work aggressively" with the EU in this area. As well, the President gave a widely watched speech on non-proliferation, his only public speech during this first visit to Europe.

PRAGUE 00000269 003 OF 006

Czech Armed Forces

¶19. (C/NF) Background: The Czech Armed forces are struggling to concurrently complete their defense reform plan (initiated in 2002) and to support deployed operations. The situation is complicated by a polarized and charged domestic political environment, reduced funding, and a lack of transparency in the procurement process. The Army of the Czech Republic (ACR) has met its broad end strength reform goals: an all volunteer force of 35,000 military and civilians; two maneuver brigades; 24 subsonic fighter-bombers (Czech produced L-159 Advanced Light Attack Aircraft or ALCA); 14 supersonic fighters (JAS-39 Gripens); one brigade each for artillery, air defense, NBC defense and engineers; and Special Forces Group. The ACR also has met its deployment capabilities goal - maintaining approximately 1,000 deployed troops in operations. However, the achievement of full operational capability of two brigade size task forces has been put off until 2013. The current CHOD, LTG Vlastimil Picek, appears committed to further reductions in civilian staffs and support units and a shift in billets to the units providing the deployable force pool. The current CHOD also grew two new deployable ground battalions out of existing force structure, through the elimination/restructuring of rescue (homeland emergency services) battalions. There are

some indications that units providing troops for deployed operations are stressed. The ACR did not meet its recruitment goals for 2008, for the first time, and the defense budget is now facing a ten percent cut as a result of the financial crisis that will take defense spending down below 1.2 percent of GDP.

¶10. (SBU) Recent Deployment History. Under former Prime Minister Topolánek's Government (which lasted just over two years), Czech contributions to Afghanistan more than doubled (from 225 in 2007 to over 500 in 2008/09), and the types of missions the Czechs accepted became much more aggressive (Czechs moved from providing security to the German PRT in Feyzabad to leading their own PRT in Logar; they deployed a security unit in support of the Dutch PRT in Uruzgan, an OMLT to train ANAAC pilots at KAIA and a large SOF contingent under OEF to KAF and FOB ANACONDA). Czech troops are not constrained by national caveats. Through it all, the Czechs have forged close working relationships with RC-E, CSTC-A (especially CAPTF), and SOCCENT. The efforts of RC-E (CJTFF101) have been particularly effective in guiding Czech deployment plans and shaping the successful efforts of the PRT in Logar as well as the new Czech helicopter detachment as it prepares for deployment to FOB SHARANA.

¶11. (SBU) As already mentioned, the Czechs provide a small OMLT to mentor ANAAC pilots and maintenance personnel (mostly Mi-24 staff), in close cooperation with CAPTF. This complements their recently completed donation of 12 Mil helicopters (6 x Mi-24 and 6 x Mi-17) that are now serving as the backbone of the ANAAC helicopter fleet. The donation was made following extensive factory overhauls that were largely U.S.-funded and were performed by a Czech MoD-affiliated helicopter maintenance depot located near Prague (approximately a \$30m contract). This same Czech MoD facility is currently performing similar overhauls of three Pakistani Mi-17s under a CENTCOM-funded program. The Czech MoD has recently indicated that it may consider a further donation of two more Mi-17 helicopters. This second donation would be welcomed by CSTC-A.

¶12. (SBU) The flagship of Czech involvement in Afghanistan is the Czech PRT in Logar. Based at FOB Shank in Pole-Alam, the total strength of the Czech PRT was increased in early 2009 from about 210 to 275 and now includes four infantry platoons. The infantry platoons are used in close coordination with TF SPARTAN to provide security of PRT activities, as well as to conduct framework and stability operations. The Czech PRT began operations in March 2008, a period that coincided with a deteriorating security situation in the province (Czechs suffered a KIA in the first months of operation). Yet despite the security challenges, the Czech PRT got a fast start and has generally received high marks for its approach to reconstruction and ability to build partnerships with local government and tribal leaders. The Czech PRT is TACON to RC-E. At the heart of the Czech PRT is a ten-person civilian experts team that consists of reconstruction experts possessing specific skills determined to be the most relevant to the Logar Province (agriculture, aquifer management, public health, education, etc). Many of the Czech civilian experts were hand-selected from the

PRAGUE 00000269 004 OF 006

substantial Czech NGO community and several have extensive previous experience in Afghanistan (as well as Iran, Iraq, and Africa). The Czech Government has made a multi-year commitment to PRT in Logar and should continue its efforts (pending annual parliamentary support) for at least another four years.

¶13. (SBU) In addition to the Czech PRT, the Czechs have also deployed a rotating 100-man SOF contingent under OEF for a period of 18 months (deployed till the end of 2009). This marks the third time Czech SOF has deployed under OEF (previously in 2004 and 2006). Czech SOF has steadily developed into a capable force that easily interoperates alongside U.S. partners. Czech Minister of Defense Martin Bartak feels particularly close to the Czech SOF and often

visits the unit both in Afghanistan and at its home garrison in the Czech Republic.

¶14. (SBU) Other Czech deployment commitments include KFOR and the EU Battlegroup. The Czechs commitment to KFOR remains strong (many Czechs view KFOR as the most important foreign deployment) and the Czech Armed Forces maintain a battalion-sized unit of about 450 in KFOR NMTF-C. Beginning in July 2009, the Czechs will also lead and provide the majority of the forces (1800 troops) to the European Union Battle Group on a six month commitment.

¶15. (C) 2010 Deployments: Czech MoD is in the process of formulating its 2010 foreign troop deployments bill. We have been told that the Czech MoD will request authority to deploy about 550 in Afghanistan in 2010, which would result in the continuation and expansion of the Czech PRT in Logar (the addition of a fifth infantry platoon and more civilian reconstruction experts) and the continuation of their presence at KAIA (national support element, helicopter training OMLT, and CBRN recon personnel). The Czechs will also propose to deploy the three-Mi-17 helicopter detachment in early 2010, which was originally forecast for late 2009 but delayed due to technical problems relating to upgrades of instrumentation and communications systems. The Czechs are also reportedly considering offering to deploy an additional OMLT to mentor an ANA Kandak.

¶16. (SBU) Such news is of course welcome in the face of recent political changes and anticipated budget cuts, but these anticipated proposals must still be approved by the government and then voted on by the Czech Parliament. Both hurdles that may not be easily cleared, since the parliamentary debate on the 2009 deployment bill was protracted and contentious. Additionally, Czech popular opinion has never been firm in support of foreign deployments and is gradually slipping even further. Thus, your taped appearance on Vaclav Moravec's respected nationally televised Sunday morning news talk show offers an important opportunity to stress the success and importance of Czech contributions in Afghanistan, especially stressing the non-lethal aspects of the reconstruction activities of the Czech PRT.

¶17. (C/NF) Czech Minister of Defense: Your most substantive exchanges will likely occur on Friday evening when you meet with newly appointed Minister of Defense Martin Bartak. Bartak has been an active supporter of U.S. policies and initiatives. Bartak was close to former right-of-center Prime Minister Topolánek and was considered by many to be actually running the day-to-day affairs of the Czech MoD under the Topolánek-led government. Bartak has been an active supporter of both missile defense and foreign deployments. Bartak speaks fluent English and many find him to have a charismatic personality. Bartak has forged close relationships with U.S. counterparts, to include former USD(P) Edelman. One caution, however: Bartak often and rather unpredictably raises issues of a tactical nature with senior U.S. visitors.

¶18. (C/NF) Czech CHOD/Chief of General Staff, LTG Vlastimil Pícek: Upon arrival you will be greeted by the Czech of the Czech General Staff, LTG Vlastimil Pícek. Pícek will then host you to dinner on Sunday. Pícek is a careful man who speaks English haltingly, feeling more comfortable with an interpreter. In his two years at the helm as Czech CHOD, Pícek has truly been a reformer, cutting waste, going after corruption within the military ranks and General Staff, and reducing non-deployable staffs/ headquarters in favor of increasing the deployable pool of forces. During your meetings with him, LTG Pícek's focus will undoubtedly be on Afghanistan. He will discuss the Czech military's 2010 foreign deployment plan and will also explain his decision to delay by several months the deployment of the Czech helicopter detachment due to technical issues related to installing secure radios in modernized Czech helicopters. Pícek has designated his Deputy and Chief of Operations, MG Jiri Halaska, to be your escort throughout the visit.

¶19. (SBU) U.S. Assistance for Deployments to Afghanistan - training and funding. In terms of training, the U.S. has provides extensive pre-deployment training support to Czech forces. Such training includes Czech participation in Mission Readiness Exercises (MREs) conducted at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center in Hohenfels, Germany. The Czechs also regularly conduct HMMWV operators training and combat life savers training at Grafenwoehr. U.S. SOF has conducted several Joint Combined Environment Training (JCET) exercises with Czech forces, and this month several Czech Mi-17 crews are at Fort Bliss Texas to conduct live environment training. This training is on top of a IMET program that in 2008 totaled \$1.6m.

¶20. (SBU) The U.S. has provided a great deal of direct materiel and funding support including 26 M1114 HMMWVs, IED countermeasures, and tactical radios. The Czechs are also large recipients of lift and sustain funding, partly as a result of an OSD agreement to provide funding as a demonstration of support to the Topolanek Government, in light of its support of U.S. missile defense policy. Additionally, the Czechs received \$2.84 of FMF in 2008. Both IMET and FMF budgets have recently trended downward, but may see future increases. (The ongoing helicopter flight training at Fort Bliss was funded by a \$2.8m plus up in 2008 FMF funding).

Other Issues to Watch - Guantanamo and Missile Defense

¶21. (C) The Czech EU Presidency has welcomed the U.S. administration's executive orders related to the closure of the Guantanamo detention facility. The Czechs have facilitated internal EU discussions at the foreign, justice, and interior ministerial levels. European Commissioner Barrot and former Czech Interior Minister Langer traveled to the U.S. in March to discuss EU questions about the detainees with Attorney General Holder and other USG officials. They also discussed this topic during the U.S.-EU Justice and Home Affairs Ministerial the last week of April. While the EU member states consider this to be a decision for each individual member state to make, they have discussed establishing an EU framework to address collective Schengen travel security concerns. However, the EU has yet to take collective action. Czech officials have been clear that the Czech Republic, while willing to facilitate EU discussions on the resettlement of detainees, cannot accept any of them due to domestic political reasons.

¶22. (C) EU membership is one of two pillars of Czech foreign policy. NATO and strong transatlantic ties form the second pillar. Given the importance the Czechs assign to their relationship with the United States, former PM Topolanek and his government viewed missile defense (MD) as a natural next step in the security partnership between our two countries. Since the United States officially presented the MD proposal to the Czech Republic in January 2007, the Czech government has been unwavering in its support, despite significant public opposition driven largely by the Czech historical experience and concerns about foreign troop presence on the Czech territory. Russian threats and intransigence with regard to MD in many ways reinforced the Czech government's determination to proceed with the project. The Czech government moved quickly to negotiate and sign the Ballistic Missile Defense Agreement and the Status of Forces Agreement. The Czech Senate ratified the agreements in November 2008. Ratification of the two agreements in the lower chamber has been suspended due to the domestic political turmoil, but also due to outstanding questions about the U.S. administration's plans. Going forward, the Czechs consider close consultations with the United States as critical.

A Strong and Reliable Partnership

¶23. (SBU) Despite its small size and at times unsettled

political scene, the Czech Republic has consistently proven to be a reliable and active ally of the United States. With a total deployable strength of only about 13,000 personnel, the Czech Armed Forces have made a significant contribution in support of coalition operations. The Czechs are appreciative of the positive role the United States has played at key moments of their history. They are, in turn, proud of their own contributions to security, democracy, and freedom around the globe since 1989.

PRAGUE 00000269 006 OF 006

Thompson-Jones